

ST. ANTHONY OF PADUA

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St. Anthony was born in Lisbon, Portugal, on the 15th August, 1195. There are three distinct phases in his life: — he first became an Augustinian; he then entered the Franciscan Order as a missionary; and lastly he took up the apostolate of the word of God, thus becoming one of the best hunters of souls.

Salient episodes of his life:

As a boy, one day, he met another boy so comely and so attractive that he approached him and asked him his name: « You will find my name written in letters of fire over the Grotto of Bethlehem; in letters of blood on Calvary; in letters of gold over all the Tabernacles. My name is Jesus and I go in search of men's hearts. » Needless to say, little Anthony gave Him his heart, immediately.

His love for the Mass was so intense that he never missed hearing it. Once, due to an urgent work, he was unable to assist at it, but Our Lord granted him the grace to see it, although separated from the church by several walls.

One day, a great sinner went to him to make his confession; but he was so upset as not to be able to utter a word: « Write your sins down on paper, » the saint told him. He wrote them down on a big sheet, under his very eyes and handed it over to him: « Look, » St. Anthony told him, « there is not a single word written on this sheet: God has already wiped away all your sins and has forgiven you; go in peace. »

He died in Padua on the 13th June 1231. He was declared a saint by Pope Gregory IX, just one year after his death. His tongue is miraculously preserved in a most precious reliquary, symbol of the praises he offered to God through the power of speech.

Ferdinand and his companions play at soldiers. Ferdinand is the leader and he has formed his army. On this occasion he gives orders for a battle. Some resist him, but he resolutely imposes his will.





Ferdinand's parents, descendants from a noble lineage, ever dream of continuing having in their family valorous captains and chieftains. His mother prays that her son be one of them.

Ferdinand takes to giving alms. He will grow in generosity by giving substantial sums of money to the needy. Love for the poor will ever be one of his main characteristics.





Ferdinand's father puts him in charge of the crops. He has enjoined on him the task of keeping birds away from the corn. Desirous of going to Mass, he orders all the birds to wait in the barn until his return, and all of them obey him.

In harbour, Ferdinand picks up a conversation and he comes to know that the ship is to ply to Antioch: «Great,» he tells them; «I, too, one day, will take ship and visit the Holy Land. If there will be a crusade, I'll join it with real eagerness.»





At dances, girls would vie with each other to have Ferdinand to dance with them, but the young lad has already made up his mind to consecrate himself to God and he keeps away from these worldly amusements.

Fr. Prior asks Ferdinand the reason why he wants to join the Augustinians. He replies saying that the only motivation he has is to imitate their example in virtue and their ardour in the apostolate.





Ferdinand leaves Lisbon and joins the Friars' monastery in Coimbra. Here, he is given a greater opportunity for meditation and deep recollection. The Monks also have a well-equipped library and he takes to serious studies.

In the monastery of the Holy Cross in Coimbra, Ferdinand, now a priest, plunges deep in the many books that will build up his knowledge. Under the guidance of able professors, he learns his religion in all its facets, as imparted to the Church by Christ. Learning of his wisdom, five Franciscan Friars, one day, pay him a visit.





In a happy conversation with the five Franciscan Friars, Ferdinand congratulates them for their missionary vocation: «How I envy you,» he tells them, «for your going to Marocco to announce the Holy Gospel. God be praised for having chosen you to such a noble apostolate.»

In a touching «Farewell», Fr. Ferdinand promises to pray for them until their return. But they tell him that they are not sure to return; they could suffer martyrdom. Fr. Ferdinand then assures them that in that case, he too, would become a Franciscan and would join them as the sixth martyr.

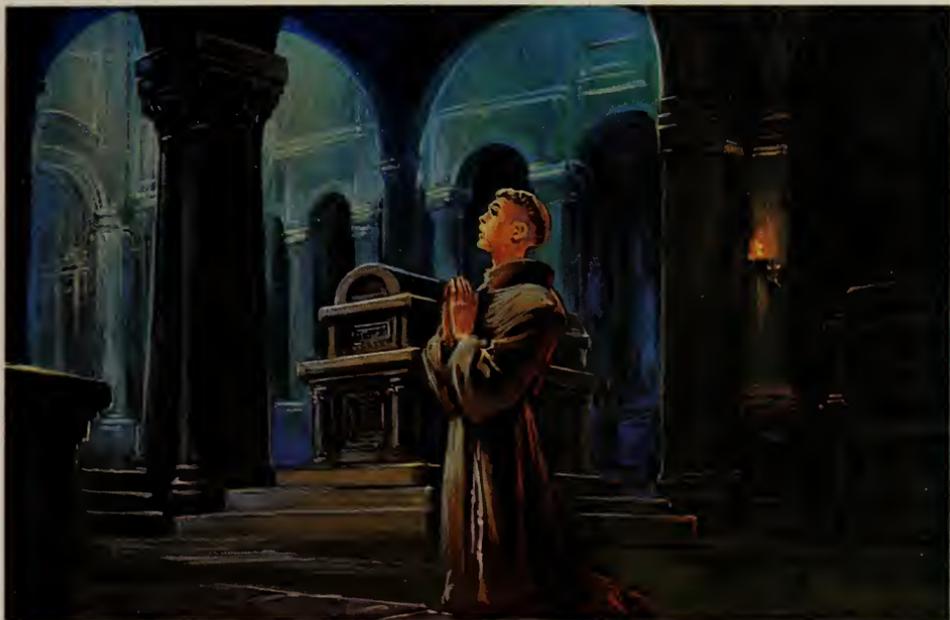




The news that the five Franciscan Friars were martyred and that their bodies had reached Coimbra, sends all the people in a delirious jubilation. The king and the queen head a procession taking the five bodies to the church of the Holy Cross.

Fr. Ferdinand is in eager conversation with a witness of the Friars' martyrdom. He tells him how they were martyred and that in their death they all sang the refrain of their Founder Francis, « Blessed be our sister Death that opens Paradise for us. »





Remembering the conversation he had in his monastery with the five martyrs on the possibility of martyrdom, he spends hours in prayer and decides to leave his monastery and to join the Franciscan Order at Olivares. Here, he changes his name and becomes Fr. Anthony.

Franciscan Friars go to the harbour to say «good bye» to Fr. Anthony on his way to Morocco: «Bet,» one of them says, «he will not come back; he too, will suffer martyrdom; he has spent the whole night, praying and repeating our Founder's aspiration, «Blessed are you, sister Death!»»





Fr. Anthony, after his arrival in Marocco, falls ill. And what sickness! He is given up by his doctor and is told to return immediately to his country. Although unwillingly, he is taken aboard a ship ready to sail for Portugal.

On his way back, the sea turns rough; a violent tempest wrecks the ship which drifts aimlessly over the swollen waves. All people on board have lost hope of surviving much longer; but, at long last, land is seen; with great difficulty, the sailors manage to reach it: "Thanks to God," they exclaim, "we are safe".





Fr. Anthony has a long convalescence; when he has regained his strength, he begins trekking the interminable distance between Sicily and Assisi, the town of his Founder. Meeting him, it is a kind of rebirth; a new phase is opening in his life.

Fr. Anthony is taken up with the fiery words of St. Francis and strengthens his resolve to work and even to die for Christ. He is then offered to stay in a monastery closer than the one he is in at Olivares, and goes to Mt. Paul, near Forli.





Fr. Anthony spends his days in prayer and meditation. He realizes all the more that every event is under the mighty protection of Divine Providence and he feels the need of an intimate union with God: he scourges himself for his sins and for the sins of the world.

Meantime the fame of his preaching is spreading far and wide. As the preacher at the 1st Mass of a newly ordained priest fails to turn up, he is asked to take over. He delivers his sermon with such eloquence that St. Francis puts him in charge of spreading the Gospel throughout Italy.





Jealousy though, sets itself to wreck Fr. Anthony's fame as the wonder worker. Some people plot together to do away with him without any further delay; others resort to calumny: « Let us accuse him of unbecoming things, » is their resolve; « in no time, his good name will vanish. »

In the city of Rimini, Fr. Anthony preaches against the Cataris' heresy: « They are condemned by the Church, » he tells them; « that is argument enough not to listen to their doctrine. » But, meantime, slanderous rumours make people keep away from him.





Fr. Anthony throws a challenge to the people: «If you do not want to listen to me, I will preach to the fish.» On the sea-shore, shoals galore flock to listen to him. People are struck by the miracle and throw themselves at his feet, begging for his pardon.

People repent and in great numbers go back to him and listen to him with rapt attention. The Saint continues to work miracles, like restoring sight to the blind, and sinners get converted.





St. Francis sends him to France to preach against the Albigenses. Conversions are few; opposition, great. Even after three years, people defy him to give a single proof that the heretics are in the wrong.

A citizen of the city of Bourges calls the people to witness the challenge he is throwing at Fr. Anthony: «I'll bring my starving mule in front of two of us: I, with a pail of corn and Fr. Anthony with the Monstrance. Let us see the animal's choice.» Perfect agreement.





All eyes are on the mule. The beast does move and takes the direction of the pail of corn; it stops awhile and then passes on. When it reaches Fr. Anthony, to the wonder of all, it kneels in adoration. The challenger beats a base retreat.

Fr. Anthony establishes schools of theology also in France to prepare his own Confreres to be well versed with God's word and to join him in instructing the masses. A good number of Albigenses return to their pristine faith.





The Albigenses find it hard to go back to the Church; they approach Fr. Anthony to have their doubts cleared. One difficult belief is predestination. The Saint's answer is easy: « We need tackling the eternal truths with true humility. »

Fr. Anthony's humility and holiness are matching his eloquence. People find these qualities irresistible and they flock in great numbers to hear him. Churches become too small for his throngs and he begins preaching in the open air.





Fr. Anthony is confronted by the Notary of Le Puy: « You have dishonoured me with your grimmicks, » he tells him; « what do you mean by bowing down to me like a stooge whenever you see me? Give me an explanation or I kill you. »

Fr. Anthony predicts that the challenging Notary will die a martyr for the Faith: « I hail you as Christ's martyr. Soon, you will lay down your life for Him. » « I am puzzled, Father, » the Notary exclaims; « I cannot make sense of what you are telling me. » « Trust in God, and the grace of martyrdom will be granted to you ».





As prophesied by Fr. Anthony, the Notary, months after his encounter, leaves for Palestine to see the Holy Places sanctified by Our Blessed Lord. Accused as a Christian, he is summarily tried and executed. Indeed, the Notary dies the death of a martyr.

News through a letter, reaches Fr. Anthony that Fr. Francis of Assisi is dead. He is thus recalled and has to leave France immediately to attend the General Chapter of his Order for the election of a successor.





In the General Chapter, Fr. Anthony is elected Provincial of the Northern region of Italy. As the new Superior, Fr. Anthony keeps on visiting every monastery in order to encourage the Friars to the practice of all the Franciscan virtues, but above all, their characteristic, Poverty.

A small girl falls into a boiling cauldron and dies instantaneously. Fr. Anthony is sent for. He pulls out the girl's corpse and brings her back to life. He quickly returns the girl to her parents and asks them to give glory to God, who had wrought the miracle.





The fame of Fr. Anthony's eloquence and depth of doctrine reaches Rome. His holiness the Pope sends for him. In his presentation to the College of Cardinals, the Pope calls him, « Ark of the Old and New Testament ». Fr. Anthony, wrapped up in all humility, delivers one of his best speeches on the Catholic Faith.

Fr. Anthony is informed that a despot is oppressing the entire region of Padua. The tyrant is determined to destroy anyone antagonistic to his sovereignty. He pillages all sorts of goods, and spreads misery all over the country. In an encounter, Fr. Anthony tames him.





Fr. Anthony's untiring preaching, his charitable works and his partaking of the sufferings of the millions, tell on his health. He is struck with dropsy which slowly paralyzes his whole body. He gives orders to take him back to the monastery, where, incapacitated to preach, he can at least write.

Fr. Anthony takes to writing more books and to prepare ready-reckoners for his Friars. His Sunday and Feast Sermons become one of the best books on homiletics. Pope Pius XII, later, will proclaim him «Evangelical Doctor of the Church.»





Count Tiso takes it upon himself to persuade Fr. Anthony not to overwork himself. But he refuses to stop even for a minute: «The devil,» he tells him, «works so hard to destroy souls. I must work even harder to save them.»

Count Tiso tries to dissuade him from going to live among the branches of an oak tree, for it would look a bit queer: «No, no, not queer,» is Fr. Anthony's reply, «but proper; I will be like a bird of the air, singing God's praises in the last moments of my life.»





A wooden cell is thus built high up amongst an oak's branches. From this new pulpit, indeed a Franciscan pulpit, Fr. Anthony continues to preach. Crowds and crowds flock to hear him, drawn by his fascinating holiness.

Fr. Anthony is dying. He wants to be taken to another monastery, in Padua, at St. Mary's. People surround the bullock-cart that carries him and ask for his last blessing.





The whole city of Padua, at the news of his arrival, flocks to the monastery of St. Mary's, but the Friars, afraid of further sufferings, divert the cart to the monastery of Arcella. Fr. Anthony is resigned to God's holy will and awaits the angel of Death to take him up to the throne of God.

Fr. Anthony is in the throes of a terrible agony, but his soul is wrapped ecstatically in God: « Jesus », he whispers, « I love You above all things and in all things. This is Your greatest commandment. » He then utters his last words: « Jesus, Mary and Joseph, may I breath forth my soul in peace with you. » He thus passes away.





St. Anthony of Padua died at the age of 36, on the 13th June, 1231. Miracles upon miracles were wrought at his tomb. Just one year after his death, Pope Gregory IX declared him Saint.

His tongue is still preserved in a most precious reliquary in the great basilica of Padua and is kept exposed to the veneration of the millions.



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From

**Rev. Fr. AURELIUS MASCHIO S.D.B.
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